

Cites Safety and Rising U.S. Dependency on Foreign Oil Imports

Istook Advocates Expanding Off-Shore Drilling

Washington, DC -- Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) today offered an amendment on the U.S. House floor to expand off-shore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. Istook said it's needed to decrease dependence on foreign oil and to make gasoline and other energy more affordable to consumers and businesses. Istook's proposed that a major part of the areas now off-limits to drilling would be opened if America's oil imports reach 2/3rds of total U.S. consumption. Currently, 58% of the oil America uses is imported.

"Domestic energy independence isn't just about the energy industry," said Istook. "It's about all of us. If we want gasoline prices to stop skyrocketing, this is part of what it takes. It's about energy to keep manufacturing in America. It's about making fuel and fertilizer affordable for farmers. And it's about the \$180-billion we send overseas each year to buy foreign oil, when we could use it to produce energy here, and to create hundreds of thousands of high-paying American jobs."

Istook's comments focused on the oil industry's environmental safety record offshore, which he says is being ignored.

"America has not had any major spill from an offshore oil well since 1969," said Istook. "Why? It's not because we're not drilling offshore; it's because we have succeeded in protecting the environment while we drill. Less than 1/1,000th of 1% of the oil produced offshore has been spilled. No other industry has a safety record like that—99.999%! Even during hurricanes, our safety measures work."

Istook noted that only 2% of oil spills have been from offshore wells despite that fact that they produce 30% of U.S. oil, and 97% of the spills are of less than one barrel of oil. He also stated that companies must obtain 17 major federal permits and obey 90 sets of federal regulations to drill offshore.

Currently 90% of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) is off-limits for drilling in the lower 48 states. In 1982, when Congress first started to limit offshore drilling, net U.S. foreign oil imports were only 28% of total consumption; today the figure is 58%. Istook's amendment would lift the current moratorium in a portion of the eastern Gulf of Mexico when the Energy Information Administration reports that the figure has reached 66% or 2/3rd of all consumption. The Department of the Interior reports that the OCS contains 76 billion barrels of oil and natural gas reserves of 406 trillion cubic feet, enough to fuel 76 million cars for over 70 years and to heat all the homes in American for over 50 years.